

A Cavalry Experience In Bosnia

by Captain Robert G. Ivy

On 6 October 1995, 3-4 Cavalry, 3rd Infantry Division, received its alert notice to be part of Operation Joint Endeavor. Prior to that time, we had no warning of a Bosnian deployment. In one day, we went from not being part of a deployment to being one of the two cavalry squadrons for Task Force Eagle, which was built around the 1st Armored Division. For the next 15 months, we became quite familiar with the Bosnian mission.

The squadron's initial training was in mine awareness in Grafenwoehr, unit certification in Hohenfels, and back to Grafenwoehr for gunnery. Our month-long training clearly showed our strengths and highlighted those tasks that we needed to practice. As we could not afford additional training time, we decided to focus on pushing down leadership and training programs to the lowest levels possible once we returned to Schweinfurt. The best example of this was the fielding and training of our new satellite navigation receivers. We put our NCOs in charge, and the entire squadron rotated through their program. In the span of a week, most of the squadron was proficient with the equipment.

Three weeks prior to the deployment it became clear that individual training and equipment fielding were distracters to our accurately closing property accounts and transferring equipment to the rear detachment. The rear detachment commander had to effectively inventory the entire squadron's installation property in less than 20 days, and during the Christmas season. Garrison staffs were a tremendous help, but they were not prepared for how quickly the unit needed to deploy. As a result, many property issues were not resolved until the squadron returned to Schweinfurt, over a year later. In addition, as part of the deployment, the squadron received new OH-58D Kiowa Warriors, complete with pilots, crews, and family members four weeks early. Because we were a new team, we had to conduct an Air-Ground Coordination Exercise, involving most of the squadron leadership. Fortunately, the depth of experience in leadership, both officer and NCO, allowed the squadron

to successfully deploy to Bosnia, in spite of these administrative and training hurdles. The squadron and troop executive officers were fundamentally responsible for pushing the unit out to Bosnia and deserve most of the credit.

The squadron deployed via ground, air, and rail. We left somewhat together, but arrived at the Sava River piecemeal. Once we arrived at the Sava River, we had to first receive and account for personnel and equipment that came through the "pipeline," and then assemble everyone and everything to cross the river into Bosnia combat-effective. The squadron's success was based on a movement plan that focused on troop-sized units, rather than one squadron-sized unit. Each ground troop was assigned a slice of the HHT, staff, and other support elements. Thus, the squadron became and moved as several equal mini-squadrons, allowing the squadron commander and his staff to attach to whichever troop was in their area and provide them with the support required to accomplish their missions.

Our first mission was to arrive in Tuzla with as much support as possible and as quickly as possible. With the *Ride of the Valkyries* blaring through our speakers, B Troop, 3-4 CAV conducted a night crossing of the Sava with 77 vehicles, stretching over two miles. About 90 kilometers later, we arrived in Tuzla and met our first opponents, an army of children! There was no school, and children were everywhere. They would routinely risk their lives diving under vehicles, moving or not, for food, candy, etc. These "infiltrators" became paramount concerns, both for our security and their safety.

Task Force Eagle assigned us to its southern sector. The United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) patrolled the sector during the civil war. Therefore, we planned a battle hand-over with the Nordic Battalion (NORBAT) unit of UNPROFOR. The planned hand-over with NORBAT, and how they interacted with the factions, greatly influenced how we conducted future operations. Once the hand-over was complete, we then

started missions, although we had not yet established a base camp.

We were told that we would be assigned, or directed to, a base camp; however, no one knew where it was or when this would take place. Thus, B Troop road-marched to the Zone of Separation (ZOS), hoping to find a place to spend the night. When we reached the former confrontation lines, the troop executive officer found some bombed out buildings nearby. Bosnian soldiers, who were waiting to go home, helped us clear what appeared to have been a farm complex. We spent most of that first night clearing our perimeter, improving positions in the rubble of buildings, and securing ourselves. In those first few days, we called our new home "Hotel Hell" but "The Dawgpound" quickly became the unofficial name, with Camp Alicia its official one. It would be our home for the next year. We spent the first two months at the Dawgpound living on our vehicles and awaiting our turn to receive the engineer base camp teams. Once the engineers arrived, construction happened quickly.

In addition to securing the camp, we had to accomplish missions. We continued joint patrols with the NORDBAT soldiers until they pulled out of sector. Coordinating with Serb forces for the IFOR takeover of Mount Vis quickly followed. Mount Vis is a mountain that juts out of the center of the Tuzla Valley, overlooking all of the southern Tuzla area, to include the single air base operated by Task Force Eagle. Whoever controlled Mt. Vis controlled the valley.

This was the first time that we relieved a factional element. Having no precedent, we decided to treat the mission as a doctrinal relief in place. We agreed with the Serb forces to move a scout section onto the mountain as they pulled a squad off. The scout section would jointly secure Serb positions, with the Serbs, for 24 hours. Then, the rest of the scout platoon would relieve the rest of the Serb forces. The relief went incredibly smoothly. The Serbs even showed us how to defend the mountain from the Muslims.



CPT Ivy, with members of a UN police team, talk with a group of Muslim men outside the village of Memici during Bosnian national elections. On their way to confront Serbs in the neighboring village of Kula, the Muslims were instead persuaded to go to the polls.

Photo: 55th Sig. Co. (Cmbt Camera)

Once Mt. Vis was secured, our priorities turned to documenting the removal of all land mines in our sector, while having both sides pull their forces back to distances agreed to under the Dayton Peace Accords. Unfortunately, both sides decided to deactivate units on the front line rather than pull them back. This left only a handful of soldiers on active duty who knew where the mines were, and minimal manpower to remove them. In many cases, we accompanied factional soldiers that had never seen the minefield they were assigned by their army to remove. Typically, these soldiers were only armed with a mine card and probe. Our engineers did the bulk of this observation work; however, we also participated on order to "backfill" our engineers so that they could do other assigned missions.

Mines were, by far, our biggest threat going into Bosnia. We trained hard in mine awareness and reaction drills. Our training paid off in the last week of January when we hit our first mine. It was a TMM-1 antitank mine, and it detonated as a Bradley ran over it, blowing off the Bradley's right side Number 1 road wheel. Two days later, one of our engineers stepped on a PMA-1 antipersonnel mine in the same area. Sometimes mines are run over and do not detonate. In both of our minestrikes, the person or vehicle was atop another mine. Our Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) became: when a minefield is detected, find the leading edge of the minefield. This helps in the placement of equipment and evacuation points. Clear along the path followed by the individual or vehicle that first went into the

minefield. This builds a known cleared area. Clear around the individual or vehicle, so that you can work. Finally, clear an intermediate work area so that any work needed to get the person or vehicle out of the minefield can be done safely or equipment can be placed so that people do not have to step over it. Because the mined area was deep, we moved the person or vehicle to the intermediate cleared area, still in the minefield, to prep them to move out. In both cases, the intermediate area was a wide spot on the pathway into the minestrike.

Operationally, our peacekeeping mission required that the squadron break down to troop-sized elements. When the squadron first arrived, it patrolled most of 2nd Brigade sector, which was about one half of the Task Force Eagle sector. This caused commanders, at all levels, to be on missions, daily. Often, I would not go to the squadron TOC unless it was for the weekly command and staff. Likewise, the squadron staff was not able to visit the troops except once a week. Often, they were part of a convoy, which could only stay a short while before moving on. This lack of contact caused perceptions to develop as to what different elements of the squadron were, or were not, doing. Furthermore, communication between the TOC and the troops was difficult because radios could not reach each other without relay/retrans stations. MSE was not available until later. While our future MSE capability reduced the road time, a lot can be accomplished face to face. In hindsight, I should have physically met with the command group and staff at least twice a

week, not including the command and staff meetings.

One of our constant challenges was manning the troop TOC. Simply, company- and troop-size elements are not designed to man a TOC 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for a year. Our answer was to have the commo NCO run the day-to-day operations with the assistance of the NBC NCO. Manpower usually consisted of command drivers, headquarters platoon drivers, and anyone that we had on profile. That way, the TOC was always manned with at least an NCO and soldier. During "crisis" operations, the executive officer and/or first sergeant would oversee the TOC, with the addition of a runner. We did not use NCOs and soldiers from the scout or tank platoons because of the need for these personnel to execute patrols and man our remote sites. At its peak, B Troop supported three remote sites that required a platoon-sized element conducting 24-hour operations.

In March, B Troop received orders to be the first unit in Task Force Eagle to go to Taborfalva, Hungary, for gunnery as part of the deployment. Therefore, we had to balance operational missions with figuring out how to train for gunnery. For example, how do we conduct TCPC/BCPC from a base camp in the Zone of Separation (ZOS), which was surrounded by minefields? Our answer was to coordinate with local authorities for a strip of road that was used only by IFOR. We then set up target pits in cleared areas next to the road. Finally, we evaluated the crews using jump radios and a chase vehicle, which carried

the TCE/BCE. We conducted the crew gunnery tests in our "motor pool" at Camp Alicia.

Our resources were stretched to the point that a broken vehicle caused undue havoc. The solution was preventive maintenance. Our mechanics were sheer geniuses, but even geniuses need a program. For us, it was assigning sections (two vehicles usually) to our motor pool for maintenance as a mission. Naturally, this did not happen daily, but it did happen regularly. Because of this program, our operational readiness rate was consistently 90 percent or higher throughout the deployment.

In August, we started working with the International Criminal Tribunal for the

base camp. Mahala was between us. I handed over the Mahala mission to my XO and started to withdraw the remains recovery team. For their own security, we brought them back to one of our remote sites. I was then able to link my forces with those of the XO. I believe that had we not had redundant command plans, we would have "dropped" one of these two missions. By the time I arrived at Mahala, the forces were separated and the Serb police forces detained. The senior NATO, Bosnian, and Serb officials were negotiating a peaceful closure to the incident. However during negotiations, the Serbs began bringing dozens of people into the ZOS by bus.

The squadron commander tasked me to stop the crowd of Serb civilians from in-

of the Serb police. I had my first sergeant send one of the police officers to the underpass to meet the crowd. The police officer assured the crowd that all was well and then returned back to my first sergeant. Once the crowd had met with the police officer, I was able to convince the leader that the best place to wait the incident out was outside the ZOS. He agreed to move back provided that I stayed with him and kept him informed. I agreed and the crowd moved out of the ZOS, back to the first delaying scout section.

Throughout our operations, we documented missions using video, instant pictures, and journals. Frequently, our most respected weapon was our camera. We were surprised by the power of the lens. Cameras caused crowds to disperse and factional police to behave. Typically, we only used cameras as a response to a lack of cooperation from the factions. The Serbs especially did not want to be documented because they felt it could bring about some sort of international retribution. Likewise, the cameras in our Kiowa Warriors proved exceptionally useful. During the incident in Mahala our pilots documented a biased journalist from Tuzla physically directing a Muslim crowd on where to engage Serb police forces. We were able to get his credentials revoked, making him useless as a newsman.

By late October, we received orders to withdraw. Throughout the withdrawal, we still had operational missions and training. For example, we had to secure a bridgehead over the Sava River and train for gunnery that we would conduct on the way home. Once we were relieved from the bridgehead, during the last week in November, we moved on to Hungary for gunnery and recovery. After which we headed home, riding back into Schweinfurt on 11 December 1996.

CPT Robert G. Ivy is a 1989 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute. He first served with Task Force 1-32 Armor (later reflagged 2-12 Cavalry), 1st Cavalry Division, Ft. Hood, Texas, as a tank platoon leader during the Gulf War and later as a scout platoon leader. After AOAC, he joined the 3d Infantry G3 staff, Wuerzburg, Germany, and later worked as the assistant S3 for 3-4 Cavalry, 3d ID, Schweinfurt, Germany (now 1-4 Cav). He took command of B Troop, 3-4 Cavalry, in October 1995, commanding through the Bosnia deployment, relinquishing in March 1997. He is currently a student at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, Calif.



At Camp Alicia, MG Nash, commanding Task Force Eagle, visits the author, at right, and two of his troop commanders, CPT Jeff Erron, at left, and CPT Simuel Shaw.

former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The remains recovery team was responsible for exhuming mass graves, and we were responsible for their local security. Because of the sensitivity of the mission, we tried to only maintain overwatch positions. Our guidance was not to be in the same "picture" with the ICTY. Still, we got a nose full.

At the same time we were supporting ICTY, the Bosnian Federation decided to push military-aged male refugees into a village named Mahala. Mahala was a Muslim village before the war and was now, due to the Dayton Accords, on the Serb side. Shortly afterward, the "families" followed. These "families" were formed around the military aged males and included women and children of all ages. The children would only stay with their "family" during daylight, when the possibility of press coverage was the greatest. The Serbs responded a few days later with their Interior Police. I was with the remains recovery team and my XO and first sergeant were at our

terfering with the negotiations. Upon seeing the crowd, I decided to try a delay of sorts. I placed a scout section immediately in front of the crowd and another 500 meters down the road the crowd was traveling. Behind these two scout sections I placed a Hungarian engineer unit equipped with dump trucks. Finally, I placed a third scout section at the mouth of a railroad underpass. To my amazement, the different points in the delay continued to slow and spread out the crowd, because they all stopped to talk or yell at our troops. By the time the lead part of the crowd arrived at our last point it was only 25 percent of its original size.

In addition to the delay, my soldiers and I had learned to watch crowds and find their leaders. There is always someone in the crowd that acts as a cheerleader or spokesperson, egging everyone else to move and act together. Once we found the leader, I talked with him as the crowd moved towards Mahala. He told me that his major concern was the safety